LABOUR MONTHLY

A Magazine of Labour Unity
Founded 1921
Editor: R. Palme Dutt

Eye-Witness in Kerala
D. N. Pritt, Q.C.

Class Strategy * R. Page Arnot

The Fight for Disarmament * Quaestor

Israel * S. Mikunis

Workers' Power * Andrew Rothstein

Labour Discussion Forum

May, 1957

One shilling and sixpence

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'WEEVA LA!'

MORE THAN at any other time, May Day is the moment when you reflect how small the world is. To begin with, the remark rises to your lips at the Demonstration (wherever that may be in the world), as you meet friends whom you will not see again until next May Day. You reflect that *'nimble thought can jump both sea and land'*. Thus, *'from limits far removed'*, thoughts are reaching Portugal from Peking, Szczecin from San Francisco, Auckland from Iceland, Berlin from Bombay, Cape Town from Canada. In all those places we have friends: we shall be with them and they with us. The barriers of *'injurious distance'* are annihilated once again; and once again we are reminded that, with the coming end of all exploitation of class by class, frontiers will lose all significance, there being then none but friendly ones. This is the big, plain, commonsense truth which is now obvious, whether your 'local Demonstration' is tens strong or millions strong. Yet only fifty years ago that was not self-evident. It could only be a matter of faith in 1907, with brutal revenge being taken on the defeated revolutionaries in Russia, when landlords and capitalists remained unshaken in the saddle in every country of the world. In those days it was only the far-sighted who could recognise the fact that the world did indeed move and who could see in which direction it was moving. Yes, how small the world is—and how fast-shrinking the capitalist corner of it. Here I am reminded that a *Labour Monthly* reader recalls from his days of childhood in Holland a marching song for socialist demonstrations, in praise of Marianna, surnamed simply 'Proletaren', (for *'Myn naam is overal bekennd'*). She wears the red cap of liberty, this child of the downtrodden, and marches to redeem society and make it free (*'En mak haar vry'*). Whilst they were singing this in Holland, the pages of William Morris's *Commonweal* were giving a tempting account (May 4, 1889) of songs which 'Suffolk peasants are still heard singing of the French Revolution' 100 years before:

Weeva la, ye French Convention,
Weeva la, ye Rights of Man,

Weeva la, ye bold Americans—
You're the lads that first began!

Our guess is that this rendering of *Vive la. . . .* might have been how it was remembered by the children of agricultural gang-labourers who first heard it from French prisoners of war. Judging from the description in Marx's *Capital* of their terrible conditions, these rural victims of rising capitalism may well have found the 'alien' captives from the French Revolution's army easy enough to understand when they told of the rights of man. Maybe their descendants are handing on the song today to U.S. airmen stationed in Suffolk or Holland? If not these at least other songs in the same spirit, celebrating 'those that first began' no less than those whose marching columns are turning the corner today. Not least amongst them *the people of England who have not spoken yet.*

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Notes of the Month

Class Strategy

R. PAGE ARNOT*

Beware
Of entrance to a quarrel; but, being in,
Bear't that th' opposed may beware of thee.
Shakespeare (Hamlet I, iii.)

THE strikes in the engineering and shipbuilding trades of the United Kingdom in March and April are of outstanding importance, both in themselves and for the lessons that may be learned from them. They began on March 16, ten days after the shipbuilding employers had completely refused the claim for a 10 per cent. increase in wages, with the strike of all the boilermakers and other shipbuilders to the number of 200,000. A week later, on March 23, and 12 days after the engineering employers had similarly given a blank refusal to a similar claim, the engineering workers were called out on strike in ten main industrial centres, to the

*The editor will resume the Notes of the Month in the next issue.

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number of nearly a million. On March 30, a further half million were called out in the area of London. The unions' decision had been to call out all the remainder (notably in the Midlands) by Saturday, April 6, if by that time the employers had not yielded. Before that date could be reached the Minister of Labour, having set up Courts of Inquiry,* besought the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions to call off both strikes: this they did on Tuesday, April 2. Thus one and three-quarter million, some of whom had been on strike for 18 days and some for two days, were called back to work without any settlement having been reached in the dispute.

A Keen Debate

Naturally, there was some heart-burning about this sudden calling-off: naturally, debate about it has been rife, and not only among the members of the 40 unions that make up the Confederation. All the organised workers in the United Kingdom are concerned. When a dispute of this magnitude occurs, its conduct as well as its origins, its calling-on as well as its calling-off, the strategy of the unions and of the employers, the tactics of the unions and of the employers, the behaviour of the newspaper press and the B.B.C., and the over-riding strategy and tactics of the Cabinet Committee of the Privy Council: all these demand the most serious consideration. These issues, apart from questions within the Confederation itself and within each of the constituent unions, are bound to come up for most anxious and thorough examination—not only by trade unionists generally, but by all who see their significance for the present stage and for the future development of the classes in British society. The dispute is not ended: and, at the moment of writing, Messrs. Jacks, Mandleberg and Geddes in charge of the Inquiry, have still to make their reports. But what has happened so far has given food enough for keen debate. It is as a contribution to this debate that we deal in these Notes with some of the points that arise at this stage of the strikes. And first, their magnitude.

Magnitude of Metal-working

Old notions about the past of British home and export trades or assumptions of similarity with advanced countries of Europe or

*Mr. McLeod, Minister of Labour, had told the House of Commons on March 12 that 'the issue is not appropriate for examination by a Court of Inquiry or other body as the causes of the dispute are clear'. Later he came to an opposite conclusion. This was after his attempt to impose an arbitrator (in ignorance or defiance of the trade union standpoint on this matter) met with a deserved rebuff.

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North America have to be swept away if we are to assess rightly the weight of engineering-and-shipbuilding within the British economy, and hence its crucial importance in the struggle between capital and labour. Within Britain's 24 million* 'total working population' (one-third of them women) less than a million are engaged in agriculture and fishery. So minute a fraction, less than 4 per cent., is not found in any other country, while in China a corresponding figure would be nearer 84 per cent. But, in contrast to its shrunken agricultural man-power, there are in Great Britain nine millions engaged in manufacturing industries. Out of these no less than *four millions* come under the two headings of 'engineering, metal goods and precision instruments' (including shipbuilding) and 'vehicles' (including motors and aircraft)—as many as are in the basic industries of fuel, power, transport and land. Within these four million lie the trades organised by the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions. The basic industries and the manufacturing industries, 13 millions in all, employ the main productive workers of Britain, on whose labour (apart from the million-and-a-half builders) a very great part of the remainder are dependent. Banking and insurance, professional and miscellaneous services, public administration whether national or local would be living on thin air if there were no productive workers.

The Position of the Employers

Glance now at the position of the employers. If for the moment we add to the working of metal the manufacture of it, the iron-and-steel trades which the Churchill government wrested from some kind of public ownership and handed back to private ownership, then the total engaged in metal manufacturing and metal-working is over four-and-a-half millions or more than half the nine millions in the whole of the manufacturing industries. Since little of the product of the basic industries or of building goes for export, British exports mostly come from these manufacturing industries and again the greater part from the trades employing these four-and-a-half millions. It is here, therefore, that we see British capital (and United States capital) very strongly entrenched, with many very big firms, with the tendency to monopoly highly developed. It is here that novelties in systems of wage payment, of strange varieties of piece-work, of time-work with piece-work intensity, of time-and-

*According to the *Ministry of Labour Gazette:* but from this must be deducted 740,000 in the armed forces and 390,000 unemployed to arrive at the numbers in 'civil employment'.

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motion study, have been chiefly tried out. Here too the sundry schemes for automation are being launched. Here profits as a whole have been rising from year to year. In shipbuilding alone, *Labour Research* tells us, the *Financial Times* list of companies shows profits declared in 1956 as no less than 12 per cent. higher than in 1955. But the maw is insatiable. Here, therefore, might be expected a chosen field for an exemplary struggle between capital and labour. Of course not all the metal trades bracketed together in these four-and-a-half millions would be affected: nor, even, in one section alone are all the employers linked up in the Engineering and Allied Employers' National Federation. But the broad picture is clear for anyone to see: and we may surmise that the Prime Minister and his colleagues have seen it, indeed have had their eyes on it for some time.

Who Egged them on?

There seems. indeed, to be no question at all that it was Harold Macmillan, as Chancellor of the Exchequer during the greater part of 1956 till the Marquis of Salisbury designated him successor to Eden as Prime Minister, and the Tory government that were behind the shipbuilding and engineering employers. It was not simply that Tory ministers would tend to be the allies of the capitalists with whom they shared a common outlook. It was that they urged the employers to make a stand against the unions. Macmillan and his henchmen egged on the employers. Our readers will remember that Mr. Thomas Graham, assistant secretary of the Amalgamated Union of Foundry Workers, gave several telling quotations in his article that prove this to the hilt. He also referred to Macmillan's Newcastle statement of May, 1956 (that another round of wage increases would be disastrous), whereupon in June an employers' spokesman made the brash declaration that if a wage claim were submitted in 1956 it would be rejected. The Confederation had not then even decided to make a claim! A couple of months later, after a Confederation conference had decided to do so, it was, as Mr. Graham showed by quoting the deputy Chief Whip, 'deliberate Government policies' that had operated to stiffen the employers long before it came to any joint meeting. Of this responsibility of the Tory government there can be no doubt. The rather plaintive request of Mr. Gaitskell that the Government should deny their suspected complicity in this dispute brought no response. Why should they perjure themselves to gratify a Gaitskell?

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Spoiling for a Show-down

But the whole attitude of the Government seems to go beyond the question of any one wage negotiation. It recalls the attitude displayed by governments after the first world war, when there was a determination to 'finish with concessions' and to have 'a show-down' with the trade unions. In this regard the years 1922, 1925 and 1926 provide a startlingly obvious parallel to the developing situation in these last months. After the 1914-18 war, when the number of trade unionists had doubled and several concessions had been won, the coalition government and the capitalists bore it for a time with wry grins ('all that lovely money frittered away on the working class') until growing unemployment gave them their opportunity. Then the atmosphere of negotiations changed abruptly. Blank refusals or ultimata became the order of the day. In swift succession came attacks in one industry after another, not only to lower wages and worsen conditions but also to break the power of the trade unions in the mines, factories and workshops. Now once more a capitalist government feels itself ready to launch an attack: and Brigadier Redmayne, the Treasury Whip who spoke of 'deliberate government policies', was frank enough when he said last September:

> The trade unions will find one thing—the atmosphere of negotiations when they come to meet the employers will be very different from what it has been during the years since the war.

'The years since the war', 1945 to 1956, had witnessed many ups and downs in the economic and political struggle. But a general employers' offensive with government backing had neither been threatened in the manner of the Treasury Whip nor entered upon. Why? Simply because the strength of the organised working class was so much greater than after the first world war and their readiness to resist a direct attack so much greater.

Back to 1922?

The call for a return to the 'good old days' of heavy unemployment, of a million or more out of work, when the unions and the workers could be 'taught a lesson' has been sounding for some time now. Up to the end of 1954 it was being urged by the *Economist* ('over-full employment'), in contrast to Butler who on behalf of the Churchill government was airily promising a doubled standard of living in 25 years. But once the General Election of May, 1955, had been reached and passed, the need for caution went by the board. Not only in *The Times* but in speeches of bankers and politicians full employment began to be treated as an evil which the 'credit-

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squeeze' would remedy. The 'credit-squeeze' succeeded in creating unemployment: though not to the amount desired by the City, it was enough for the grand design of 'back to 1922' to be matured. In the spring of 1922 the attack was directed on the engineers as part of a general offensive. The lock-out which lasted over many weeks ended, as the miners' lock-out had ended a year earlier, in a defeat for the engineering workers. Thereafter wage-cuts were imposed on one industry after another: and with the constant threat of unemployment the workers' standard of living was forced down nearly everywhere. For a score of years the figure of unemployment was above the million mark. A whole generation grew up, cradled in poverty. The very politicians, Macmillan included, who look back with horror on these days are now driving along the path that leads back to 1922, despite their protests to the contrary.

The British Way of Life

It was clear then from the outset that the Government were behind the employers in their refusal to grant an increase in wages. This was so even before the claim for 10 per cent. was put forward on October 25 and rejected on November 29, 1956. This was so when the claim was renewed on February 12 and again blankly rejected on March 12 of this year without even any offer of a lesser sum. Such an unyielding attitude could only have one issue—a strike struggle. Some employers did not hide their intentions: and Sir William Grant (Chairman of the West of England engineering employers' association) on March 11 blurted out:

> We want to fight it out ourselves. . . . We have got to stand firm and prove to these fellows that things are not done so easily.

By mid-March, having 'let loose the dogs of war' the Government could now withdraw to the wings, change its costume and make a new entrance in the robes of a conciliator. It was now time for the Minister of Labour to play his part, to offer arbitration to the shipbuilding workers (which they rightly rejected) and to 'mediate between the parties'. This bitter comedy with the capitalist government as 'quick-change artist' was not now played for the first time: it is part of the long run called 'The British Way of Life': and everybody should be aware of it. After the first strikes there were some union leaders who proclaimed that they were concerned only with the fight against the employers and that the unions were 'not fighting the Government'. This at best was self-deception: and it did not mislead the men on strike. But it revealed a fatal weakness, a blindness to the plain facts of government strategy.

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Court of Inquiry

The Minister of Labour set up a Court of Inquiry and invited the disputants to state their case. Now Courts of Inquiry were first set up under the Industrial Courts Act of 1919 as part of the body of new legislation (including the Emergency Powers Act) devised to deal with trade disputes and the greater strength of the trade unions. These courts can be used or not used by the Government: it all depends on the situation: and in some big strikes they were not used. The same applies to the trade unions: they can participate or not, according to their judgment. But whenever there is reason to think that the government have been backing the employers, then a Court of Inquiry, while it may be entered into, should be carefully scrutinised in all its aspects. It must be clear that the Court is there to fulfil the functions given it under the Act and only for that purpose. If a Minister seems to have ulterior motives or if he appears to be using the acceptance of the Court as a means to weaken one side, then there must be the utmost vigilance, the utmost wariness in estimating the strategy and tactics of the government.

The Snowflake on the River

There are certain resemblances to the dispute in summer 1925 between the miners and the coal owners, who demanded a cut in wages and had behind them the Government ('all the workers of this country have got to take reductions in wages to help put industry on its feet' said Prime Minister Baldwin). The miners refused the cut: the employers announced a lock-out: the miners would not yield. Thereupon the Government set up a Court of Inquiry. In that situation, the miners, then in conference at Scarborough, refused to take part: and remained unmoved by the pleadings of the Minister of Labour and the shower of letters and telegrams sent from London to their Executive. The Court, having listened to one side only, went through the solemn farce of issuing a report, published as a white paper which was

> Like the snow falls on the river
> A moment white, then melts for ever.

The miners' unions had correctly estimated the Government's ulterior motives in setting up the Court. They had rumbled the Government's strategy: their own strategy proved superior: and by the end of July, 1925 ('Red Friday') the Government and employers had been forced to yield. The lock-out notices were withdrawn. The wage-cut had been stopped.

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Get the Facts Straight

Since then, in time of peace, the cabinet has been chary of setting up courts of inquiry or committees of investigation without the assent of the parties in dispute. But, in time of war, when other procedures were used, the habit grew up of insisting on a return to work first so that Order 1305 was actually continued for several years after the defeat of the fascist powers. This, as a habit of thought, still lingers in many skulls on both front benches in the House of Commons. But no trade union official need pay any attention to this. It is over and done with. The Ministry of Labour itself explains the Industrial Courts Act which was based on the Whitley Committee report as follows:

> The Ministry of Labour should be authorised to hold a full inquiry when satisfied it was desirable, without prejudice to the power of the disputing parties to declare a strike or lockout before or during the progress of the inquiry.

Therefore, when the shipyard inquiry was mooted, it was made clear, quite correctly, that there could be no insistence on a return to work if the inquiry were accepted. After acceptance, the shipyard strike, also quite correctly, continued unabated.

The Trade Union Strategy

Until the setting up of the Courts of Inquiry, the strategy of the unions had been very clear. The shipbuilding unions' application for 10 per cent. had gone forward first, as the shipyard employers, with swelling profits and a swollen order book for five years or so ahead, were in the weaker position and could hardly (but for government stiffening) find plausible reasons for refusing an advance. If the shipyard owners yielded, it would have been a lever to move the other employers. If, however, the blank refusals left nothing but strike action, then in consequence the shipyard workers would be called out first: and a week later would come the turn of the engineers. The subsequent tactic of calling out the workers in engineering also by stages (ten industrial centres by March 23, the Greater London area by March 30 and, failing a satisfactory offer by the employers, all the rest by April 6) was more open to question. Some believed that all the engineers should have come out together, like the shipyard workers. Others believed that a strike by stages would have a cumulative effect. They may have thought that in an industry where there has been no big struggle for over a generation, it was safer to call out the best organised areas first: but the magnificent response to the strike call showed no ground for any such fears.

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They may have felt concern about the sufficiency of union funds. There are arguments either way. What there can be no question about is that to call off the strike in response to the appeals from the Minister of Labour, without any settlement reached, was the strategy of retreat. The leaders responsible for it may claim that it was retreat from an untenable position. But there is the view voiced both by other leaders and by the strikers themselves in the various centres that it was retreat from a position of strength to a position of weakness.

The Vote of One Union

This strategy of calling off the strike before a full trial of strength could be reached was indeed peculiar: and the more so when we consider the part played by Sir Thomas Williamson, general secretary of the Municipal and General Workers' Union and president this year of the Trades Union Congress, and by Mr. W. J. Carron, the president of the Amalgamated Engineering Union and spokesman for the Confederation at the conferences with the employers and also at the Engineering Court of Inquiry. Both are well-known 'right-wingers' in the Labour movement, Sir Thomas for many a year, while there can be no question of the fervently anti-Communist attitude of Mr. Carron. It is a truism that men of their stamp are more susceptible to the appeals for the preservation of harmony between the classes and for the stilling of industrial strife than those who get the name of 'left-winger', militant socialist or communist. Now within the 40 unions of the Confederation there was never any doubt as to how Sir Thomas or his subordinate officials would cast the vote of the union. About the Amalgamated Engineering Union there was no certainty: and as it was by far the largest constituent of the Confederation, everything hung upon its half-million vote. The decision to call off the strike was by 710,177 to 449,162, a majority of 261,015 votes. Had the A.E.U. vote been cast otherwise, the decision would have been to continue the strike by 999,162 to 210,162, or nearly a five to one majority.

The Vote of One Man

'Why issue a strike call for 500,000 on Saturday, only to send them back on Tuesday?' Before this question about the Greater London area (which is the most extreme form of the questions that apply to the strikes as a whole) can be answered, it is necessary to go a little further into the 500,000-strong vote cast by the Amalgamated Engineering Union representatives. The decision on this

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matter rests with the members of the Executive Council of the A.E.U. The Executive members, as it turned out, were equally divided. It was by the casting vote of the chairman in the A.E.U. Executive that the decision was made to call off the strikes, a decision that may affect the livelihood of some three million workers.

> The decision to go back depended almost entirely on the whim or courage of one man. He was Mr. W. J. Carron, the hesitant, softly-spoken Roman Catholic President of the Amalgamated Engineering Union. (*Daily Telegraph*, 3/4/57.)

Mr. Carron had a perfect right, under the rules of procedure, to give his casting vote as he did. Whether it was a wise decision is another matter that has come under much discussion in the unions and in the engineering shops and the shipyards.

A *Quick 'Blood-let'*?

Some older trade unionists have been uncomfortably reminded of the General Strike 30 years ago when several million workers responded to the strike call only to find it called off abruptly (with the miners abandoned, to struggle on alone) and when the peculiar strategy of the right-wing leaders in face of a rising spirit of struggle seemed to be that of a 'quick blood-let'. But the analogy, if there be one, with 1926, does not hold good in every respect, so involved were the factors in the General Strike. In one respect, however, there is a close resemblance. On the eighth day of the General Strike, the T.U.C. General Council issued a Strike-Order to take effect from that midnight to all engineering and shipbuilding workers not yet affected. On the next day, Wednesday, May 12, 1926, the same General Council, without any settlement, declared the General Strike terminated. The feeling then amongst the engineers and in the shipyards was that they had been called out on strike for no purpose. Thirty years later a similar feeling was manifest in London in the first week of April.

Shaken Morale Restored

The engineering and shipbuilding workers were surely dumbfounded on Tuesday, April 2. As is bound to happen when a retreat is sounded without good reason, as it seemed to many, there was a short space of disillusionment, a temporary loss of confidence in the effectiveness of trade unionism. But morale was soon restored: and it was the left wing, the militant socialists, the communists

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who played the biggest part in restoring morale. They brought home to the workers the positive lessons of the strike struggle, the strength revealed, the necessary steps forward to make the unions greater than ever. They laid bare the rôle of the government, the rôle of the millionaire press and showed, in face of all the forces against them, how solid and strong had been their ranks. Nor did they fail to recall how the same millionaire press doing everything in its power to defeat the strike and discredit its leaders, had previously devoted column after column to attacks on the left-wingers and the communists: and that the millionaire press had interfered in the democratic choice of trade union officials by their members. There are many today in the Confederation unions who recognise that they had been deceived by the red-baiting propaganda also in its virulent United States form, imported and peddled by the usual array of renegades.

Three Great Struggles

Thrice in the last 61 years the workers in the engineering and shipbuilding trades have been plunged into national struggles. The first was the lock-out of 1897, the second was the lock-out of 1922, the third was this strike precipitated by the attitude of the government and the employers. Each of these struggles has one common feature, the aim to break the power of the unions in the workshop. The 1897 lock-out ended after seven months with the Terms of Settlement in which it was laid down that the Federated Employers 'will admit no interference with the management of their business'; that on machines they would 'appoint the men they considered suitable to work them'; and claimed the right to 'determine the conditions under which machine tools shall be worked'. The 1922 lock-out, excluded the A.E.U. and the other trades now in the Confederation, and began on the pretext that on overtime and the apprentice and machine question the unions were usurping 'managerial function, and began on the pretext that on overtime the unions were usurping 'managerial functions'. These 1956-57 protracted wages negotiations were suddenly transformed, as soon as it came to a strike struggle, into a demand that the unions surrender the positions built up in the shops and yards. Thus too was the use the shipyard employers made of the Court of Inquiry where they spoke at length in denunciation of 'restrictive practices'—meaning trade union customs that safeguard the interests of their members. In spite of the talk about 'co-operation' it was in essence re-assertion of the standpoint of 1897 and 1922.

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The Shop Stewards

What set a limit to the employers' claims for unfettered autocracy in the workshop? It was the rapid growth in the great industrial centres of the shop steward movement during the 1914-18 war. At first it was an unofficial movement: but when it had proved its worth, it became part and parcel of the union constitution. It sprang from the undefeatable spirit of the workers: through all the attempts to break through the power of the unions in the workshops, the elected shop stewards maintained, and in the last war extended their position. It is through the shop stewards that the power of the trade unions within the workshop has been kept and held. The employers can no longer assail the union officials, national and local with costly suits at law, as once in the nineteenth century. The Trade Disputes Act of 1906 now protects them, as it also lays down the right of peaceful picketing. But though these older weapons have been struck out of their hands, the employers still have the power of dismissal without compensation. Whenever the chance arises that power has been ruthlessly exercised to get rid of the shop stewards. Equally the workers have known that they must take instant counter-action in defence of the men they have elected to be their spokesmen in the workshop.

Victimisation Repelled

Thus when the strike was called off without the usual stipulations about the return to work of all affected, there were several firms which sought to take advantage of this to get rid of 'the ring-leaders', the shop stewards. The strength of the workers was shown in the flagrant case of Firth Brown Tools Ltd. by the Sheffield District Committee of the A.E.U. sanctioning the immediate protest strike of all its members. No doubt District Committees of this quality—and there are not a few of them—will incur the familiar string of denunciations beginning with the millionaire press and ending with those parliamentarians who, as Anatole France pointed out a half-century ago in *Penguin Island,* can always be relied upon to spring to the defence of the employers. There are black sheep in every flock.

The Strange Case of Briggs Bodies

To this general picture of victimisation repelled there is an exception: in the case of Mr. John McLoughlin (the shop steward in Briggs Bodies, a Ford subsidiary) who in February was dismissed;

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reinstated to bring back the workers; and, once they were back, again dismissed. A strike ballot, held by the A.E.U. Executive showed the workers ready to strike again, by an overwhelming majority to defend their shop steward. Instead of acting on its own proposals, ratified by the strike ballot, the A.E.U. Executive accepted a Court of Inquiry, presided over by the Scots lawyer, Lord Cameron. This gentleman behaved in a manner unusual since the Industrial Courts Act of 1919 was passed. By a series of questions which were not merely irrelevant but impertinent, he almost succeeded (no doubt without wishing to do so) in importing a foreign atmosphere that recalled the behaviour of a Senatorial Committee investigating 'un-American' activities. In his report, which was not published till after the major strikes had been called off, Lord Cameron vindicated the dismissal of the shop steward by Briggs Bodies. It seems that this firm's activities are in no way 'un-American'. Lord Cameron, who was not sitting as a Law Lord but simply as a person appointed for a specific purpose by the Minister of Labour, went on in his report to propose that the Amalgamated Engineering Union should alter its Rule Book! What next? Is the Union likely to bow before this recommendation? Or will they follow the pattern of the miners' unions in 1925 and treat the report, to vary the words of Burns, as

> A soot-flake on the river
> A moment black, then melts for ever.

A True Shop Steward

Before this Lord Cameron Inquiry began there appeared a statement on the part of Briggs Bodies at the end of February. This subsidiary of Fords, itself the offspring of a multi-millionaire and fanatical enemy of trade unionism, grandly announced that, while not employing Mr. McLoughlin any longer, they would pending the result of the inquiry, pay out to him £13 15s. a week, *as an act of grace*. This assumption of magnanimity did not deceive the dismissed shop steward, who said in answer:

> All my life I have worked for what I have earned, and have kept my hands clean, never accepting charity or any money for which I have not worked. Always I have maintained my pride and my trade union principles, and on those grounds I have refused to accept this offer of wages for doing no work . . . like any other craftsman who only earns his living with the skill of his hands it would be repugnant to me.
>
> I have never been a parasite on the capitalists and I do not intend to be made one.

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So long as there are men and women in Britain who will answer like this, so long the labour movement will have a kernel of incorruptibility that the jaws of capitalism cannot crack.

Lessons for the Future

The strike struggle lit up the industrial landscape of Britain and dispersed the poisonous smog of propaganda, pretence and cant of class harmony. Class strategy stood revealed in stark outline. To all, including hesitant leaders and the troubled parliamentarians, it revealed how great are the potentialities for struggle within the working class. It dispelled the misty hopes and forecasts that there would be wide-spread black-legging. On the contrary. Witness the factories forsaken by men who queued up to take out union cards. Witness non-union women workers who came out in a body and immediately set to work getting in touch with the union and *electing shop stewards*. And, for the intensity of the struggle, witness those women who lay down in the roadway before a stray blackleg coach, and dared it to drive on. But there are other and more sombre lessons to be learned by the strikers themselves. The Confederation trade unionists who chose their officials, must now reflect carefully on their choice in the light of this experience. The main aims of the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions were agreed by all. But in the strategy and tactics of the struggle the Confederation seemed sometimes to be speaking with two voices. The contrast in the utterances of Mr. E. J. Hill and Mr. W. J. Carron, both in manner and content, was at times painfully evident. Confederation trade unionists, if in future they wish to be rid of this handicap to their cause, must choose between the two types. Again, in an industry where strike ballots are not so prevalent (and where the recent example, at Briggs Bodies, was dishonoured) it is essential for the men and women on strike to make their standpoint so unmistakeably clear that their officials are bound to ignore all outside influences and pay the utmost heed to them. If all these lessons of the strikes are well learned—and not only by the Confederation workers—then the employers in any industry will think twice before provoking a struggle, the string-pulling Tory government will face defeat and the prospect ahead for the working class will be bright.

April 11, 1957.

CORRECTION : April issue, page 155, line 31 : after 'alternative', insert 'to'.

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EYE-WITNESS IN KERALA

D. N. PRITT, Q.C.

ON April 5, 1957, I was, I think, the sole European in a large gathering which watched eleven Ministers (mostly young, and all competent, sober and responsible, and reducing their own salaries to approximately £6 4s. per week in a country where the cost of living is not very different from ours), take the oath of office. The eleven (nine Communists and two Independents) were members of a Government formed by the Kerala State Communist Party after a clear victory at the polls which had brought 60 seats to the Party and five Independents fully pledged to support the Party, in a Legislative Assembly of 126 elected members.

Kerala, the southernmost state of India, consists of the old Princes' States of Travancore and Cochin, with some territories lopped off and some added in order to produce—in accordance with the prevalent 'linguistic' policy—a state in which the prevailing language is Malayalam. It is the smallest in India, the most densely populated—well over 1,000 to the square mile—and, with its very low standard of living is probably the poorest of them all. It is the most Christian of the states—something like one-third of the inhabitants are Christians, including three of the eleven members of the government. It is the most highly educated and in particular the most highly literate of the states; in this not yet lovely world, that adds to the general acute unemployment problem a particular problem of educated unemployment. With this oddly mixed composition, it has a good tradition of militancy and political consciousness.

Like many other states, it has a 'deficit budget': that is to say, it has to be subsidised from the centre out of taxes levied by the central government on the citizens of Kerala and of all other states. Like not a few other states it has a large food deficit, needing to import a great deal of foodstuffs, especially rice, to keep its population alive. Its fertile soil nevertheless produces many useful things. Tea, coffee, and rubber grow in plantations which are largely foreign owned and this gives a typical colonialist slant to the economy by the export of profits. Various rural industries—pepper, spices, coir, etc.—are carried on in the villages. Thus the balance of agriculture over industry does not look so bad in mere statistics, as in some states; but in reality industry is backward. One way to improve the standard of living would be to introduce new industries, for which there is ample scope; hydro-electricity, mining and fishing are all possi-

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bilities. It is thus extremely interesting for a Communist government to take office in Kerala state. But the position has nothing 'black and white' in it.

If British students, accustomed to the simple outlines of unitary government, are to estimate it with any proper understanding, they need to remind themselves of the limitations of a federal constitution. Kerala is one of over a dozen states in the Union of India. The federal central government is of course a Congress government, and so is almost every other state government; the one or two exceptions are coalitions in which Congress predominates. Under a federal constitution, functions and powers of government are divided between the centre and the states. In India, the states, including Kerala, have nothing to do with defence, foreign affairs, railways, maritime shipping and navigation, most seaports, posts and telegraphs, foreign trade, and corporations, including banking and insurance but excepting co-operatives, oilfield development, certain mines, fishing beyond territorial waters, salt, law-courts, income tax (except on agriculture), customs duties, taxes on capital or capital value, estate and succession duties (except on agricultural land) and much other taxation; and they have only limited power over criminal law and procedure, preventive detention, economic and social planning, monopolies and combines, trade unions, labour disputes, social security, unemployment, labour welfare, price control and the press. The matters left to their exclusive control include agriculture, land, forests, most industries, salaries of ministers and land revenue.

It is, of course, quite possible to govern a state, and to govern a state well, within the framework (or fetters) of such provisions; but they are not well adapted to carrying through a revolution, and the outside observer should avoid both extravagant expectations and pessimism. The new government has power to govern well rather than to make great changes. But that power, in the particular circumstances of India and Kerala today, is of even greater importance than it would normally be. There are several reasons for this.

The constitution gives it power to introduce extensive land reforms (and it has already announced its intention to do so). This includes fixing fair rents, security of tenure and stay of eviction, maxima (or 'ceilings') for individual land-holdings, distribution of surplus lands, fixing wage minima, and the nationalisation of plantations.

Up to the very fifth of April, 1957, there has been a long period of 'President's Rule' in Kerala. This has made almost all sec-

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tions of public opinion ready to welcome any government which shows reasonable prospects of stability. 'President's Rule', a device inherited from the British, consists in the taking over and operation by the President—in effect by the central government—of all the legislative and executive powers of the state government. It can be and has been used whenever the political set-up in the state is thought by the centre to produce instability. Such dictatorial rule, particularly in a Southern region as far from the seat of central government in Delhi as Moscow is from London, is generally extremely unpopular. It can scarcely be said that the Communists' absolute majority is directly due to resentment of this sort; but it is pretty certain that the general desire for stable and honest government brought over enough of the middle-class vote to 'top up' the solid worker and peasant support to the point of full victory.

So much of declared Congress policy is good and progressive that the Communist government can claim Congress authority for much of what it proposes to do. The old cynical Tory game of 'dishing the Whigs' is as it were available in reverse, in that the most progressive elements can introduce the most advanced legislation that is practicable in the circumstances, and point to programmatic declarations of its opponents as support for almost every item of that legislation. And, in sharp contrast to such declarations, so much of what Congress governments in the States (as well as at the centre) have actually been doing for years past has consisted in failing to live up to their policies and promises—and not least in allowing whosesale corruption to grow up—that the public is overjoyed to see any government that looks like doing no more than really carry out Congress policy, including honest administration.

Congress has three features which together present an odd picture. Firstly it has a right wing which represents all the big—the very big—money in the country, and is extremely reactionary. Secondly it has a left wing which secures excellent programmatic declarations in favour of 'a socialistic pattern of society'; far-reaching Five Year Plans (which corruption and the right wing contrive to frustrate) and a good foreign policy. Thirdly, thanks to the use of the British single-vote system and the divisions between opposition parties, it has such a grip on the central government and on nearly all the State governments that the normal checks of parliamentary democracy (in particular the existence of practicable alternative governments) do not really operate in it, and it becomes increasingly unpopular and out of touch with the people, in direct proportion to the increasing wealth of the rich and the increasing poverty—Oh!

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Poverty!—of the poor which result from the grip of big money and the general corruption.

The vital and intensely interesting problem of the immediate future lies in the relation between the Communist government of Kerala State and the Congress government at the centre. A federal country like India can only run if there is a great measure of sincere co-operation between the centre and the state. The Kerala government has asserted that it will work with the centre within the Constitution, whilst seeking constitutionally to get the Constitution amended where that may be required. The centre asserts—and I was assured of this in Delhi—that it is determined not to obstruct the Communist government on any doctrinal grounds (one old friend adding—not unfairly—that he could think of very many governments in different parts of the world which could be relied on to do the exact opposite in like circumstances). In reality, of course, the centre has a good deal of control, by 'the power of the purse', over a deficit state, and indeed over any state that wants industrial development or encouragement. In reality the right wing of Congress will be seeking at all stages to frustrate—subtly or crudely—the government of Kerala, and will work harder in this direction in proportion as the Kerala government succeeds in demonstrating that it can govern, and is governing, well. This form of opposition will be particularly virulent if Kerala succeeds—as it must work hard to succeed—not merely in stopping corruption but in prosecuting the corrupt, who have many friends on the right.

In reality, again, an important element in this struggle will be public opinion. It will be strongly pro-government in Kerala; in the Union of India in general, there will be at least a large element in favour of giving Kerala every chance; much of the left wing will support it; and there are important figures in Delhi who will sincerely support it too. It will be a mighty and confused struggle; and I think that the friends of Kerala need not be too fearful, in spite of the strength of the big money and its press.

There are already signs of the coming conflict, eddies and swirls in the river telling of rapids ahead. The main agent and representative of the central government in any state, *de facto* and *de jure,* is the Governor of the State, who is appointed by the centre and has great powers. The present Governor of Kerala, Dr. B. R. Rao (Chief Minister of Hyderabad at the time of the trial of the Telegana peasants) was exercising up to the revocation of 'President's Rule' on the fifth of April all the powers of government: after that

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date he exercises all the normal (and substantial) powers of a State Governor. If attempts are made from the centre to frustrate the state government, his office will necessarily provide one of the main channels for the work. It is interesting to note three things he did in the last few days of his period under 'President's Rule'. Firstly, he used the powers he possessed as in effect the entire government of the state to raise the salaries of higher government servants. Secondly, after both the Communist leaders and the five Independent members who make up the absolute majority had publicly and unequivocally announced the unqualified support of these five Independents for the party, he insisted on seeing the Independents separately, to ask them in effect whether they and the Communist leaders, with whom he was going to have to work as governor, were telling the truth. Thirdly, being entrusted under the Constitution with the right, 'if he is of the opinion that the Anglo-Indian community needs representation in the Legislative Assembly of the State and is not adequately represented therein, (to) nominate such number of members of the community to the Assembly as he considers appropriate', and with the duty to seek the 'aid and advice' of the Council of Ministers in making the nomination (in reality, this means in India, as it would in Britain, that he would accept their advice as to the nomination) he chose deliberately *not* to wait until the fifth of April, when there would be a Council of Ministers for him to consult, but to nominate a person of his own choice a few days before, when—'President's Rule' still prevailing for another day or two—Pooh Bah had only to seek the aid and advice of Pooh Bah.

Thus did he show his teeth; but all these three steps antagonised public opinion and thus weakened his position. The third step, in addition, angered the Anglo-Indian Community, in whose eyes the Governor's nominee was quite unrepresentative of their interests, and created the suspicion that the Governor was using a provision designed to serve a particular community to further instead the anti-Communist interest by reducing a majority of four to a majority of three.

All in all, the fifth of April was a great day, the culmination of a long and often bloody struggle of oppressed workers and peasants, the inauguration of a period of important if limited opportunity to establish freedom, progress, prosperity, and honesty, if in fetters. Poor in goods, rich in experience and courage, the people of Kerala can now lay the basis of their own future, and bring great encouragement to their fellows in the rest of their country of great problems and great hopes.

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THE FIGHT FOR DISARMAMENT

QUÆSTOR

'HYPOCRISY', wrote a famous seventeenth-century French moralist, 'is an homage which vice pays to virtue'. He was thinking of the private lives of the nobility and gentry around him. Had he been among us today, he might have been inspired by British Tory policy on the most burning of all international problems.

British economy is being twisted and tortured under the heavy burden of armaments. Britain was spending 9 per cent. of her national income on defence, compared with 5 per cent. for other West European countries, said the present Prime Minister on May 16, 1956. If the British figure were cut to 5 per cent., it would provide £700 millions a year spare resources. 'If we got only half of that £700 millions shifted into exports, it would certainly transform our foreign balance. And if we got the other half shifted into fixed investment, there would be a good deal less critical comment about our low investment percentage. . . . It does slow up a person's running pace a bit, if he has to carry two rifles, not one'.

He was still at it on April 5 this year. 'Seven per cent. of our working population are engaged in defence. Defence has made very heavy demands upon the metal-using industries. Too many of our scientists and technicians are engaged in the complicated tasks of research and development for defence purposes. Some of these resources must be used for export and for investment. . . . But do not let us despair. We shall work hard for comprehensive disarmament.' The last was more than he had said a year before: then, his conclusion had been that 'by and large, we shall go on carrying our second rifle'.

Why the change? It was due to forced recognition that the British people are groaning aloud at the increasing menace of Mr. Macmillan's rifles. Rising costs of living, which even delegates at his own Conservative Central Council, on March 22, warned him were creating 'utter hopelessness' among their electors: the purchasing power of the pound steadily falling: doctors preparing for strike action no less firmly than industrial workers: protests against the senseless waste of hundreds of thousands of young men's energies and talents on so-called 'national service', rising on all sides: and over all, the horrified outcry of every party except the Tories, of

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mothers and churches, of the nation at large, at the terrible threat of the hydrogen bomb and atomic missiles, both 'tactical' and 'strategic'—these are the forces which squeezed the perfidious promise out of Macmillan.

Perfidious? Yes, a pledge given only to be broken at once. For on April 4 the Defence White Paper gave him the lie direct.

A cut in expenditure? Yes—of £79 millions on £1,499 millions: that is, a shade over 5 per cent. A reduction in man-power? Yes—of 65,000 by April, 1958, on a total of 690,000: that is, of under 9½ per cent. Neither cut offers any real relief to the economy. But in return there is to be concentration on nuclear weapons; guided missiles, under American as well as British control and on American bases in the British Isles, are to replace fighters; the Navy itself is to be 'remoulded' into a few groups of aircraft carriers and supporting vessels, suitable for conducting nuclear and atomic warfare. The latter becomes the standard and inevitable form of war. And, while 'there is at present no means of providing adequate protection for the people of this country against the consequences of an attack with nuclear weapons', fighter aircraft are to be kept for the 'limited purpose' of defending bomber airfields—until the fighters can be 'in due course replaced by a guided missiles system'.

What a happy prospect for that section of the British people not engaged in defending bomber airfields! What a comment on Macmillan's exhortations not to 'despair'! Only a week earlier, writing of the Government's wriggles on the question of abandoning nuclear tests, *The Times* had prophetically written: 'Once again, as has so often happened in disarmament discussions, Britain has eaten her words almost as soon as they were spoken'.

Of course this is an old custom of British governments. In May, 1952, June, 1954, and again in April, 1955, the British Government proposed a 'ceiling' for armed forces (1½ millions as a maximum for the biggest Powers and less for the others) and a calendar of disarmament by stages. But directly the Soviet Union accepted both proposals (May, 1955) the British Government dropped them like hot coals. In February, 1956, Macmillan suggested an agreement to cut conventional armaments without waiting for the prohibition of atomic weapons. At the United Nations Disarmament Commission, the following month, the U.S.S.R. accepted the proposal—whereupon the British Government rejected it, and said atomic weapons must be considered as well! In July, 1956, at the Disarmament Sub-Committee again, the British Government proposed

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a new and higher 'ceiling' for armies (raising the maximum to 2½ millions for the United States, China and U.S.S.R.)—and abandoned the proposal immediately the Soviet Union accepted it: or, to be precise, trotted out such a series of preliminary political conditions as to postpone for years any real prospect of reducing armaments.

However, it is in connection with hydrogen bomb tests that Tory double-dealing has reached criminal proportions, threatening the whole future of the world.

In order to see it in perspective, we should remember that the Soviet Union has been pressing since June, 1946, for the complete banning of atomic weapons and destruction of existing stocks, under international supervision, and since September, 1953, for similar prohibition of hydrogen weapons. Since February, 1955, the Soviet Union has repeatedly proposed that all states should give a solemn pledge to each other not to use these weapons. In May, 1955, the Soviet Union first proposed agreement to stop all nuclear tests: this proposal was repeated in November, 1955 (at Geneva), in March, 1956 (at the U.N. Disarmament Commission's sub-committee in London), in July, 1956 (in a response by the Supreme Soviet to the Japanese Parliament's appeal), in November, 1956 (in new Soviet Government proposals for disarmament), in January, 1957 (at the Political Committee of the United Nations Assembly) and again in March (at the sub-committee of the Disarmament Commission in London). Moreover, since March, 1956, all these proposals were to stop the tests *immediately*, without waiting for any other disarmament agreements.

All these proposals have been rejected, and the Soviet Union in self-defence has proceeded with its own manufacture and tests. And those who think the U.S.S.R. should unilaterally abandon tests, without any promise of negotiations, should remember this. In 1955-57 it cut its armed forces, by a unilateral act, by nearly two millions, without meeting any response whatever from the British Government except jeers and insults.

On July 23 and 24, 1956, and again on December 20, Sir Anthony Eden declared that his government was ready to discuss, at any rate, limitation of hydrogen-bomb tests. But on March 26 the Soviet Foreign Ministry also announced that the Soviet Government 'is willing to conclude an agreement on a standstill, that is to say, a temporary suspension of such tests for an appropriate period, to be fixed at the same time'. In the Disarmament Sub-Committee the Soviet representative added that this would ease international

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tension, provide a step towards the full banning of such weapons, and relieve public fears of the danger to human health.

Like the Vicar of Bray, Macmillan's Government then 'turned a cat-in-pan once more'. It announced at once that it would not abandon or suspend tests at all, under any circumstances—and only made the mountebank offer of an agreement to 'register' forthcoming tests with the United Nations—as though that could alter the situation in any way. Macmillan himself had the insolence in the House of Commons on April 1, to call the Soviet offer to abolish all tests a 'last-minute conversion'—obviously relying on members' ignorance of the calendar of such offers, ever since May, 1955, set out above—and announced that 'the whole defence strategy upon which our policy is based' depended on the use of nuclear weapons.

Thus the issue on this awful threat to the world is clear. The British Government insists on maintaining it, the Soviet Government offers to end it, or at least to suspend it pending negotiations for abolition.

Incidentally, it does no service in the fight against the H-bomb menace for the Labour Party's *Daily Herald* (April 6) to suggest that the Soviet leaders are 'homicidal liars' for continuing to explode the bombs when all their initiatives to end bombs and tests by agreement are deliberately rejected—and when even the Parliamentary Labour Party only arrived on April 3 at the point of deciding to press for what the Soviet Union had already offered a week before.

The other aspect of disarmament on which some immediate relief could come to the world is in Europe, as *The Times* pointed out when the Disarmament Sub-Committee met again in London (March 18, 1957). 'Is it unreasonable to think that there might be a return to the idea of a limited demilitarised (or partially militarised) zone through the middle of Europe?' it asked.

No, it is not unreasonable. For the Soviet Union has already endorsed such a plan in advance. Here also a little history is essential: for, as *The Times* bitterly remarked, the British Government and its friends have 'by no means' stuck to plans in this sphere, too, which they put up in the past.

On July 21, 1955, at the four-power 'Summit' Conference, Eden proposed that on either side of the line dividing east and west a zone of joint inspection of armed forces should be established.

In November, the same year, at the four-power meeting of Foreign Ministers (of whom Macmillan then was one) it turned out

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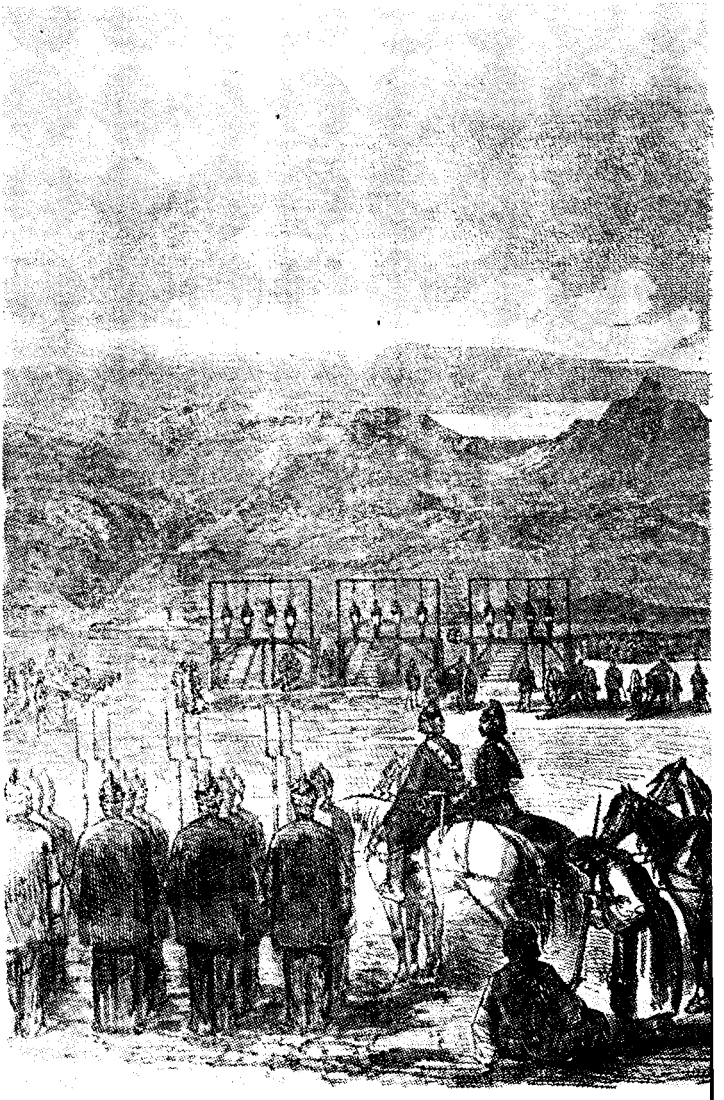
The 'Indian Mutiny,' 1857



'Execution of mutinous Sepoys on parade, Oc

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, 1857.' (*From the Illustrated London News*)

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that the two sides had developed this proposal in very different directions.

The Soviet Union suggested that a zone of limited armed forces and armaments, under joint inspection, be established through the middle of Europe—to include both sections of Germany and a group of the neighbouring states on either side, west and east. Half the foreign troops in Germany should be withdrawn. This could be accompanied by a security treaty between the Nato and Warsaw Powers respectively. The effect of this would have been considerably to reduce international tension and increase mutual confidence, and thus prepare the way for more far-reaching measures.

But this did not suit the British Government. 'The Eden plan is something of a skeleton in the Western cupboard, and the Western Ministers would much rather quietly forget it', cabled the *Manchester Guardian* representative at Geneva (November 2, 1955). Instead, they produced an ingenious scheme for a partially disarmed zone on either side of the *eastern* frontier of a united Germany, which was free to remain part of Nato. Thus Poland and Czechoslovakia were to be partly disarmed, while Nato's frontiers were to be moved 300 miles *eastward* from the present 'dividing line'—the boundary between the two German Republics. This was a very pretty scheme for weakening the Socialist camp and strengthening that of the capitalist countries, which its authors of course knew would not and could not be accepted.

In the last few months the Soviet Union has returned to its offer, as *The Times* has hinted. In a new disarmament plan which it circulated on November 17, 1956, it proposed that in addition to the general scheme for reducing armed forces (i) armed forces of the Great Powers in Germany be cut by a third this year, under international inspection (ii) armed forces of the Great Powers in countries on either side of Germany be reduced considerably this year (iii) air photography by either side be allowed, 500 miles east and west of the line separating the two sides (iv) a pact of non-aggression between Nato and Warsaw Pact countries. The total effect of these proposals—clearly made as a first step, to speed up wider disarmament on the lines mentioned earlier—would of course be precisely that which *The Times* suggested.

The proposals have since been repeated—in a Tass statement on February 1, 1957, and at the Disarmament Sub-Committee on March 18. Moreover, the first secretary of the Communist Party of

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the Soviet Union has twice confirmed that this is his country's policy. 'If you withdraw your troops from Germany, France and Britain—I am speaking of American troops—we will not stay one day in Poland, Hungary and Rumania', Khrushchov told pressmen on November 17. The U.S.S.R. would withdraw its forces from eastern Europe 'if the western Powers withdraw theirs from the Continent', he repeated to a Japanese visitor (*The Times,* March 19).

How have the Tories replied? By silence. Only one of their mouthpieces, the latter-day *Manchester Guardian* (once a Liberal paper) goes further: it pretends it has not heard of the Soviet proposals, and says that Soviet policy does not 'encourage us to look for a chance of withdrawing troops from both sides of the Iron Curtain in Europe'. The time may come, it says with its tongue in its cheek, when 'a mutual withdrawal of power from Central Europe will become a possible matter for negotiation', and Western Governments should 'persuade Russia that a withdrawal could be both safe and useful' (March 16, 1957).

But these are only delaying manœuvres. For sheer monumental stupidity, however, the tactics of the Tories' parliamentary rivals take a lot of beating. On February 7 Aneurin Bevan in Venice told a press conference that there ought to be a 'neutralised' buffer zone, comprising *eastern* European countries and the whole of Germany. On March 18, not to be outdone, Hugh Gaitskell told an admiring audience in Berlin that foreign forces should be withdrawn from Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia (where there are none) and East and West Germany: that there should be 'control' (by whom?) of these countries' national forces: but that this did *not* mean the withdrawal of American forces from Europe, and Nato 'would have to continue'. On April 1 Mr. Gaitskell was actually badgering Macmillan to accept these proposals.

How the Tories must have laughed up their sleeves to hear the Labour Party leader (amid the cheers of his followers) urging them to adopt their own proposals of November, 1955! Outwardly, in form, of course they were different—they spoke of 'neutralisation' where Macmillan's proposals had talked of 'a military balance'—but the substance was the same: weakening of the Warsaw Pact, politically and militarily, to the point of emasculation, while leaving Nato in full possession, except for the forces of Germany which would be nominally outside it. And the Tories were thereby assured that, far from taking advantage of the disgust and horror

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created among the British people by the blind alley into which they had been led by Tory servility to the United States and arrogant aggressiveness towards the U.S.S.R., the Labour Party's spokesmen were throwing away all their chances, by ensuring that their idiotic proposals would be rejected by the Soviet Union as they were when put forward by Macmillan.

Of course everyone knows why the Labour Party leaders imagine that they can succeed in inducing the Socialist countries of eastern Europe to commit hara-kari where Macmillan failed. They have fallen victims to their own propaganda about events in Hungary and Poland last autumn, and imagine that the Socialist camp is tottering. In due course, naturally, they will learn better: but why should the people of Europe, and particularly of Britain, suffer from their folly, and from the continuing war perils of a continent armed to the teeth in this era of nuclear weapons?

One ominous reminder came but a few days later. Adenauer, spokesman of West German monopoly capitalism, declared on April 5 that his government would now require 'tactical' atomic weapons, and hinted that more powerful nuclear weapons might be needed as well—of course in order to 'play its full part in defence of the West'. Hitler said that too.

However, pressure from the rank and file brought about a successful revolt among Labour M.P.s on April 3 against Gaitskell on the question of H-bomb tests. It could win a second victory, if the job were tackled resolutely. You can't fool all the people all the time.

FROM THE *LABOUR MONTHLY* OF 25 YEARS AGO

THE FRUITS OF CAPITALISM

At a time when our powers to produce surpass anything which our forefathers could have dreamt possible, when by the aid of science and machinery in industry we are capable of producing in super-abundance, when through our creative efforts the wealth and luxury of the ruling class transcends our comprehension, we see at the same time only starvation and devastation in the homes of the millions of our class. In return for our toil we receive hunger and war.

From *The War and the Unemployed*,
by Wal Hannington, May, 1932.

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ISRAEL

S. MIKUNIS

[In view of the great interest in the present position and future of Israel in the Middle East, we are pleased to print, slightly abridged, this speech of the leader of the Comunist Party of Israel, delivered in the Knesset (parliament) on March 6.—Ed., L.M.]

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Knesset!

If there is a fraction in this house today which has the full moral-political right and obligation to move a vote of no-confidence in the Ben-Gurion government—this is our Communist fraction. We have been the sole fraction in the Knesset that rejected the adventure of the war against Egypt under the command of the British and French colonialists and with your participation; we have been the only ones that warned of the dangers inherent in this adventure; we have predicted its certain failure; we have sounded the alarm over its disastrous consequence, for the political status and the economic situation of Israel. Aware of our national responsibility and faithful to the cause of peace, the security of Israel and her future, we demanded the return of the Israeli forces from all occupied territories to the armistice lines.

Now, more than ever, many people understand that Israel did not reap any benefit from the Sinai adventure, that she only drew the chestnuts out of the fire for the British and French colonialists. Reality itself has verified all our political warnings and assessments. Following the war, the honour of Israel has been stained in the eyes of the world; her political status has been gravely affected; her economic position has been damaged; Israel-Arab relations and her relations with the countries of the socialist camp have been worsened; she had to retreat from all occupied territories; needless victims have fallen. Now even a blind man can see that the way of war has failed, that the policy in the service of foreigners 'from positions of strength' has become bankrupt. All those who care for Israel's peaceful existence and her future in this part of the world, have to unite in an energetic fight for a basic change in the policy of Israel, for the formation of a government of peace and national independence. . . .

The Ben-Gurion government deserves no-confidence not only because of its responsibility for the war and its consequences, pernicious to Israel; it deserves it also because of its delaying the

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full evacuation from all occupied territories for months, with the encouragement of the imperialist powers. This delay rendered an important service to these powers, and particularly to the United States, for intensifying its intervention in the Middle East and thereby raising the tension in our region and aggravating the position of Israel in the Arab East and on the international arena. During the period of the delay, the government has assisted the United States to become the principal 'mediator' in the Middle East and to interfere in the internal affairs of the countries of the region, with the aim of advancing the 'Eisenhower Doctrine'. During this period, you have circumvented the resolution of the United Nations Assembly, you have fully leaned upon Dulles, you have, step after step, subjected Israel to American rule.

Haim Meguri-Cohen (Herut): Whose rule do you want?

S. Mikunis: I want Israeli rule over Israel.

The big crime of the Ben-Gurion government consists not only in that it has thrown Israel into the Sinai adventure as the vanguard of the Anglo-French aggressors, but not less in that in retreating from Sharm-a-Sheikh (Gulf of Aqaba) and the Gaza Strip it has put Israel into the service of imperialism—this time mainly of American imperialism, according to a secret agreement which today is already not so secret, with the United States rulers. . . .

The whole noisy discussion on the question of the so-called American 'guarantees' to Israel; all the enthusiasm of Ben-Gurion over the 'declaration' of Eisenhower; all the energetic demands of the Mapam leadership for 'more concrete' guarantees from Foster Dulles, voiced by people who declare their faith in revolutionary socialism—all this is a big bluff; all this is intended to blur the basic truth that it was the government of *Israel* which gave guarantees and promises to the United States to assist them in their intrigues for military intervention in the region; that the government of Israel undertook the shameful task to guarantee enslaving American tutelage over Israel in the service of the Lords of oil and Wall-street capital.

This is a most worrying situation from the point of view of our national interests. In implementing *thus* the retreat from Sharm-a-Sheikh and the Gaza Strip in collusion with the United States for the sake of the Eisenhower Doctrine, the government of Israel has lost another opportunity to convert the retreat from the occupied territories into a political act of lessening the tension in the Israeli-Arab relations and of creating the pre-conditions for a just peace

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settlement of the issues outstanding between Israel and the neighbouring states. The secret agreement with Foster Dulles aggravates Israel's subservience to the United States, abandons Israel to isolation and dangers; imposes on her the task of outpost in the region in the service of imperialism, mortally hated by the neighbouring peoples; and puts obstacles in the way of liquidating the malignant Israeli-Arab conflict.

From this tragic situation, only the United States rulers have benefited on the one hand, and the big bourgeoisie on the other. The big bourgeoisie, the big speculators have enriched themselves, have in this period become fat on the pretext of the 'emergency hour', at the expense of the working class and the masses of the people. The bourgeoisie and the government have exploited the 'opportunity' to impose sanctions on the toilers: the tax burden has been aggravated, the cost of living has soared, tens of thousands of families have been thrown into the throes of unemployment. The social achievements and rights of the working class have been cut down, the living standard of the working people has been lowered without precedent; for the war policy affects first and foremost the toiler, as it affects first and foremost the national interests of Israel. . . .

Honourable Knesset,

The Premier's speech yesterday was made under the shadow of the 'promises' he received from Eisenhower. This was the poorest part of the speech. Ben-Gurion wants us to believe that it is possible to build something on those promises, while it is known to anyone who cares to know that Eisenhower himself hardly holds his own positions in the Middle East and that every passing day moves the United States more and more to the same situation in which England and France find themselves today in the area. It is not accidental that to this very day, after eight years of existence of our state, the Israeli government has not succeeded in guaranteeing the most vital national interests of Israel—her recognition by the Arab states, signing of a peace treaty with her, security and calm on the borders, freedom of navigation, etc. The government could not guarantee all this, because it leaned upon imperialism and observed the Arab East through the rifle barrel, because the policy of military government towards the Arabs of Israel, because the policy of Kibia and Kufr Qasem makes it impossible to guarantee the interests of our people and country. Only without and against imperialism and its aggressive pacts; only by means of peace and

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agreement; only through the acknowledgement of the just national rights of the Arab-Palestinian people—viz., the recognition of the rights of the Arab people to self-determination and of the rights of the Arab refugees to return to their homeland, the country of both of our peoples; only by abolition of military government and granting equal rights to the Arab population of Israel—only thus is it possible to secure for our country a status of a state recognised and endowed with equal rights in the Middle East to ensure our peaceful existence, our security and our future in this part of the world.

Different sections of the people of Israel understand more and more that it is impossible to go on in this way, that a change is required in our situation, that the change can and must come from inside. The time has come to bring about a basic change in Israel's policy from dependence on imperialism towards a policy of peace, independence and neutrality. Many non-socialist states, both small and large, in Asia and Europe, have chosen this path, and it has proved its superiority—politically and economically—over the dependence on the warmongers, the colonialist enslavers of peoples. Today there are objective international conditions and factors, and foremost the socialist camp, which enable also a small state like Israel, to take up a new way to ensure its national interests. The Knesset, the ruling circles of Israel, all those whose duty it is to care for the peaceful existence and independence of our country, must most seriously heed the new initiative of the Soviet Union regarding the Near and Middle East which opens new horizons for Israel.

We refer to the programme to ensure the peace, the independence of the peoples and the economic development of the countries of the Near and Middle East formulated by the former Soviet Foreign Minister, Mr. Shepilov, in his speech at the Session of the Supreme Soviet on February 12 this year.*

*The Government of the U.S.S.R. proposed to the governments of the United States, Britain and France to exert a common effort for the implementation of the programme in the Near and Middle East, on the following points:

(1) Preservation of peace in the area by settling controversial questions solely by peaceful means through negotiations. (2) Non-interference in the internal affairs of the countries of the area; respect for the sovereignty and independence of these countries. (3) Renunciation of any attempt to involve these countries in military blocs with the participation of the great powers. (4) Abolition of foreign bases and withdrawal of foreign troops from the territory of the Middle East countries. (5) Reciprocal refusal to deliver arms to Middle East countries. (6) Aid in furthering economic development of the Middle East countries without any political, military or other conditions incompatible with the dignity and sovereignty of these countries.

This programme entirely conforms with the interests of all the peoples of the area, including Israel, and opens a genuine possibility for the solution of the Israeli-Arab conflict.

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Hanan Rubin (Mapam): Is the Communist Party for freedom of navigation for the State of Israel?

S. Mikunis: Yes. This is well known. I made a declaration in the Knesset to that effect only two weeks ago.

In view of all this, abandon the illusions about the 'promises of the President of the United States', adopt a policy of political realism, stop the foolish and criminal slander campaign against the Soviet Union—a campaign which first and foremost harms Israel—and do everything necessary to normalise and improve our relations with the Soviet Union.

A bitter experience of many years proves that the government headed by Ben-Gurion is neither willing nor capable of carrying through the necessary change in Israel's policy. This was especially demonstrated during the last months, since the Sinai adventure. For the honour of Israel, for its peaceful existence and security, for freeing our country of its isolation in the international and Middle East arena, for ensuring our independence and the lives of our sons and daughters, for paving the way to a just and peaceful settlement of Arab-Israeli relations, for ensuring our people's freedom from foreign yoke, and for our future as a state recognised and endowed with equal rights within the family of the peoples of the Arab East —for all this, we propose to the Knesset to express its no-confidence in the Ben-Gurion government; because of its responsibility for the adventure of the war against Egypt in collusion with the Anglo-French colonialists, disgracing Israel, causing needless victims, inflicting grave political and economic damage, and also because of its agreement with the government of the United States which invites American armed intervention in the Middle East, which endangers Israel's security and sovereignty, as well as the peace in the whole area.

We call on all patriotic forces in the people, irrespective of political and national differences, to unite in the struggle for a basic change in the policy of Israel, from dependence on imperialism and serving its ends, to a policy of peace, independence and neutrality, to unite in the struggle for the formation of a government of peace and national independence.

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LABOUR DISCUSSION FORUM

LETTERS *flocked in on the Rent Bill and the St. Pancras rent policy. This month we find space for five, including three with much experience of local government in London. Another councillor opens interesting new questions which should be high on the next Labour Government's agenda. Last day for the June issue (short letters, please): Thursday, May 9, to:*

THE EDITOR, LABOUR DISCUSSION FORUM,
134, Ballards Lane,
London, N.3.

★

After You, Neighbour!

Councillor Mrs. Middleton said some thoroughly sensible things about the Rent Bill in your March number. But now the Bill is on its last Parliamentary lap there are points arising about the next steps, especially about Labour Party policy.

It appears to me that the tactics of postwar governments have been to deal *seriatim* with different kinds of tenants—I had almost said *classes* of tenants. Looking back I recall the squatters' actions (of which I then thoroughly disapproved); the 'requisitioned' tenants' troubles; the difficulties of owner-occupiers with rising mortgage interest charges (after all, you are no better than a tenant whilst the building society holds the deeds of your castle); furnished tenants and rapacious landladies; council tenants and their 'Means Tests'; the Repairs Act dress rehearsal for private tenants; and now the decontrol Bill. The attack has been one by one, on Hitler's temporarily successful model.

Each time one class of tenant has been bearing the brunt, the rest of us have tended to look on or to pass by. I do not think it is surprising that even yet there is but slight realisation that the purpose of this Act is total decontrol, which will have serious consequences for all tenants. It is understandable too that tenants' organisations tend to flare up and fizzle out according to local problems and how far it has proved possible to get local results. Yet even where this has happened a gain has been made. Former battles recollected in tranquillity can only bring confidence. Others have to face for the first time the unpleasantness of having their private affairs made public property; the only consolation is to realise how very many people are ready to look forward in anger.

So I have been alarmed to hear tenants and residents say: 'Once the Royal Assent is through, we shall have to pack up.' Surely the reverse is true. Within a matter of weeks scores of thousands of still-for-the-time-being-controlled tenants will get the six months notice of formidable rent increase. The tenants of the neighbouring larger houses will be faced with the *via dolorosa* ending in decontrol and rent unlimited. As the iniquity of the Act comes home simultaneously the balloon will indeed go up. Then two things will happen. Tenants' organisations will be swamped with calls

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for help, explanations, technicalities, search for loopholes, etc.; and indeed lawyers are expecting to be making hay under this Act for years to come. Tenants' bodies will have to prepare for this; I don't see what other type of body can cope in the first instance. Secondly, there is going to be a major political upheaval. Every tenant under notice, every relative who may have to 'double up' (where not already quadrupled up), every member of any organisation he belongs to, from his trade union to his darts club—all these are going to reach for their vote. As a weapon they may find it a broken reed, but it is one which they will reach for at once. Municipal and Parliamentary candidates are going to be asked: 'What will your party do about this Act?'

How soon is the Labour Party to announce firmly: 'We shall repeal this Act *before* that six months' notice expires; and for that purpose we are calling immediately for a General Election'? Why have they not done so already? If they are afraid of 'antagonising the middle class vote', to show the slightest sign of going slow on this Act or being afraid to 'unscramble' it is not only guaranteed to antagonise my friends and myself but even to lose them their working class vote also.

'LUCKY JIM',
Manchester.

The Rent Bill, Next Steps

Important contributions on rent policy have been made by your correspondents Peggy Middleton and A. W. Stallard. Meanwhile the Rent Bill has steadily made its way nearer to the Statute Book. The Government intends to go through with this wicked and anti-social measure, regardless of warnings from all quarters. The only voices it will hear are those of its real masters, the insurance companies, property trusts, landlords and bankers. These are the interests which will benefit by profiteering from the wasting asset of our ageing stock of rented houses. If anyone thought that the Tory Party had changed from what it was in the 1920's and 1930's their illusion is shattered. That at least is one result of the Bill.

The fight against the Bill must continue, and if it is passed in a substantially unchanged form there is still a big task before the Labour movement in minimising its worst effects.

First, as to the fight to have the Bill withdrawn or greatly modified even now. Although the Labour Party has contested this measure strongly more can be made of one weapon: the Party's own policy for rented property, 'Homes of the Future'. The contrast between treating housing as an urgent social service and regarding it as a field for private speculation and jungle economics is striking. Moreover, the Labour Party should say in the most positive terms that the return of the next Labour Government will mean the immediate taking into public ownership of all properties rent-controlled *on 1st January, 1956,* regardless of events since the passing of the Rent Bill. It must be made plain now to prospective speculators. Also, where an unconscionable profit has been made out of the property, whether through extortionate rents being charged or through a high profit being made on sale, *no compensation will be payable to the owner.* This statement—with a Labour Government imminent within three years—would have the effect of making the Government's masters have another think. It might lead

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to something important happening to the Bill. It is well worth doing now. To Labour friends who have pointed out to me the administrative difficulties I would say that they will have bigger problems to face if the next Labour Government really means socialism in national and local affairs.

If the Bill becomes law unchanged, in the fight to mitigate hardship Labour-controlled authorities can lead the way. St. Pancras has shown that a determined Labour authority need not have its housing and rent policy dictated by the Government. Theirs may not be the only way; but the main thing is for Labour Councils to take every possible step to show that they have something better than the Tory free-for-all to offer. Defeatism must be thrown off and every opportunity taken to increase immediately the supply of publicly owned rented property. The existing Housing Acts give powers for sub-dividing large and under-occupied houses; houses can be taken over before requisitioning ends in 1960; s.9 powers under the Housing Act, 1936, should be widely used to compel repairs; slum clearance and redevelopment can be vigorously promoted. Councils should also state immediately their plans to deal with the evictions under clause 10 (formerly clause 9) of the Bill. Ministry opposition to the full use of powers can be anticipated, but with determination even this obstacle can be overcome.

Where, as in my own sorely tried borough, Labour does not hold power there is still much to be done. All the above policies can be constantly thrust upon the majority party (which may sometimes take steps in the right direction in sheer self defence against the charge of inertia); tenants can be kept informed of their new circumstances. For example, all Labour Parties and tenants and other organisations can offer facilities for up-to-date advice on the many complicated aspects of the measure (certificates of disrepair, new maximum rents, security pending decontrol, etc.)

But above all the movement must say and go on saying that it stands for the early end of private landlordism in any form; and that at the earliest possible moment it will substitute a fair rent and repairs policy for the state of deliberately contrived chaos which the Tories are devising.

GEOFFREY DRAIN (*Councillor*),
London, Hampstead.

Ratepayers' Burden

I can appreciate and sympathise with Councillor Stallard's authority in its housing problem. In West Ham, we too have for very many years been facing a serious and difficult position. Being highly industrialised and having a number of docks in the area, West Ham suffered great devastation from bombing. Nearly a third of its 50,000 houses were destroyed; and thus, with 15,000 families on our waiting list, £7,000,000 spent on building, and interest at £500,000 per annum, our rate at 28s. in the pound was getting too heavy a burden to carry. The population is mainly workers, the greater area is occupied by rail, docks and large industrial undertakings, all derated. Together this all created an almost hopeless situation. We decided to be realistic. At meetings we explained just what the position was and upon whom the blame rested. We have two very active representatives in Parliament —Arthur Lewis and Elwyn Jones, and we as an authority have persistently 'pestered' the Ministry.

Knowing that we shall be unable

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to build enough houses for all in the next 30 years, we have decided to adjust our points priority scheme, cutting out all whose housing needs are not 'urgent'. This reduced our waiting list to 8,000; so although the need remains, the list is shortened. As to rents, Councils have a responsibility to all; any action therefore should be in the interest of the majority. With that in mind we have instructed the Housing Committee to prepare a scheme which will be fair to most tenants of the Council and cause the minimum financial suffering to all.

Good or otherwise, our scheme cannot be satisfactory because the ratepayer is being made to bear an unfair burden which can only be alleviated by the Government. If the Government reinstates in full the re-rating of industrial undertakings: reduces loan charges and pays local authorities 100 per cent cost of repair and maintenance of major roads through the area: then we shall be able to go ahead with confidence building houses to capacity, and charging rents and rates commensurate with ability to pay.

ABE WOLFFE (*Councillor*),
West Ham London.

Fresh Air for Socialists

What a breath of fresh air Councillor Stallard's letter brings to real Socialists, and fresh air is what is needed in the movement today. If members of the Labour Movement were to think more clearly they would realise that the St. Pancras rent policy is one to be proud of and taken as an example by all Labour local authorities be they County or Local. (I wish that my local authority, Deptford, had had the foresight and courage to adopt the same policy instead of increasing the rents.) This is socialist policy really being carried out; and had this policy been adopted by all Labour authorities even the present stupid, stubborn Tory Government of today would be thrown out of office by the refusal of local government to bow down to central Government pressure. I think the last paragraph of his letter is clearly the attitude to be adopted: 'that our job as socialist councillors is to lead the people in a fight against Tory policy, and only by making our whole policy public and rallying around us the support of the whole *movement* will we succeed.'

A. G. KEYSE,
Deptford.
Ward Chairman.

The Joker? Council Rents

I was very much interested in Councillor Stallard's letter about the St. Pancras rent policy. One of the present stumbling blocks to progress on housing is the high level of council house rents. It paralyses attempts to frame a successful national housing policy.

How can you get anywhere with housing, people ask, without public ownership of land, nationalising the building industry and breaking the City's financial grip, as a start—without breaking through to a socialist society? It is bad enough trying to make education a social service under capitalism, or to achieve a free health service (fancy calling it 'free' when you pay in advance all your working life, with contributions for ever being stepped up!). Yet it is to the advantage of the ruling class as a whole for education and health to be at public cost. But when it comes to housing and land—real property, as the lawyers call it—why, that is getting just a little too near the capitalist's bone.

So heads are shaken; and Labour councillors feel themselves to be in

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a dilemma not to be solved short of socialism. And they are wrong. In fact socialist society will be achieved exactly in the process of struggling for a solution to capitalism's sordid problems, of which housing is not the least.

The trouble with the Labour Party's 'municipalisation' scheme is not technical nor financial. The real reason for a general dragging of the feet over it is the failure of the Party to come out with a good fighting rent policy. Whilst Labour councils and individual Labour councillors fall for Tory propaganda about 'economic rents' and themselves introduce differential rent schemes on council estates, it is no use expecting wild enthusiasm for municipalisation. To the ordinary man and woman it simply spells rent increases.

Let us be blunt. Tory propaganda neatly plugging the old, old rates theme has won a hearing amongst not a few private tenants and owner-occupiers. You would think it was not the landlords and the City but the unhappy council tenant who raked in their rent and interest! Yet the Labour Party painstakingly insists upon proving to tenants at large that when it comes to putting up council rents there is no difference between them and the Tories.

'No remedy under capitalism with a Tory Government'? Having splendidly reached that conclusion, it is an ideal moment to explain why that Government and that system should go! But perhaps the idea is to wait for the Rent Act to reduce private tenants to a condition of even worse insecurity and higher rents than council tenants—thus at last creating unity amongst them, in equality of misery? But presumably the movement would then come to put up the council rents even higher, on the ground that prevailing rents rose.

No, the Labour Party has not stood up and fought that divide-the-tenants propaganda. If some of their own voters now believe it, then it's high time to follow the example of St. Pancras and fight it out.

P. DEBELL,
Plymouth.

How Green Were His Spectacles?

Your reference in the March Notes to Moses and the green spectacles which the Sandys Mission brought back from the U.S. puzzled me for seventy-two hours. At last the penny dropped. But the trouble is that another reader, well up in the Bible, is feverishly searching his reference books for mention of spectacles, green or otherwise.

M. SHAW,
London, E.9.

★ (*If the reader is still searching, recommend Oliver Goldsmith's* The Vicar of Wakefield. *When Dr. Primrose's second son returns from market, his mother complains of how he has been done. 'And so,' returned she, 'we have parted with the colt and have only got a gross of green spectacles with copper rims and shagreen cases! A murrain take such trumpery. The blockhead has been imposed upon, and should have known his company better.' 'There, my dear,' cried I, 'you are wrong; he should not have known them at all.'*).

High on Labour's Agenda

The T.U.C.'s proposal on *pensions* is that there should be an immediate (imagine that!) increase of three shillings in the £ to catch up with the rise in the cost of living! The Labour Party, seeing itself as the government of the early future must set its sights higher than this. We all know the time-lag between decisions on pensions and implementation. Labour must set about corre-

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lating the pension structure to the earnings of the workers in industry as a whole. This has been done in the Soviet Union and is under consideration in Western Germany. Pensions in Australia respond to the cost of living index. Labour should set itself to help in bringing about a 'Charter for the Aged' and campaign for it.

A second matter of urgency is the *reduction in the armed forces* and to end the manufacture of conventional weapons. A cut of far-reaching proportions in the number of Service men abroad. The abandonment of the rocket bases in the Hebrides, etc. An enquiry for finding new work to do in the factories now on arms production. New export markets for these goods must be canvassed now. The Labour Government must put an end to the export of arms, etc., abroad to small states to use one against the other.

Thirdly, a great extension in *technical education* to deal with the country's need for new machine tooling. The improvement of salaries and working conditions of scientists and a wider use of study while at work.

Add to plans for atomic power the reclamation of tidal shallows, the building of the long overdue Channel Tunnel, the production of electric power by dams in tidal rivers as the French are now attempting. To resurrect the pigeon-holed scheme for harnessing the Severn tidal bore, and even to consider portions of the Goodwin Sands for poldering on the Dutch model. To see whether the falls from existing reservoirs can be trapped for power.

Labour must show itself technically fitted to direct the future of these small islands to a productivity and standard of living that will no longer exist on petroleum and mineral concessions held by force and chicanery in the colonial world.

TOM BARKER (*Councillor*),
London, N.W.5.

★

On Hearing Experts Discuss Nuclear War

(*B.B.C. Home Service, Tuesday, April 2, 1957*)

Their voices were diffident but comfortable.
One even had a country burr.
Major wars, they said, were out.
But limited wars? Ah yes! We could still have *them*.
Korea type? Or type Vietnam?
Dear listeners, take your pick.
There's many a lovely land
Untouched as yet, that we might safely pox.
Christians, take heart of grace! England, be comforted!
And now let us go quietly to bed.

OSMOND ROBB,
Edinburgh.

(This month's prize of ONE GUINEA *is awarded to Councillor Tom Barker for opening topics which should be* 'HIGH ON LABOUR'S AGENDA'.)

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WORKERS' POWER: A POSTSCRIPT

ANDREW ROTHSTEIN

[*In preceding articles a brief account was given of the Soviets, or Workers' Councils, through which the working class in a number of countries, after the first world war, sought to establish its political power; and of the Factory Committees or Councils, through which it organised its struggle at the point of production—essentially an economic struggle against the owners of particular factories, but widening at times into a political one, against the whole capitalist class and the capitalist state.*—ED., *L.M.*]

Great Britain 1915-1926

The experience of the British working class also has its contribution to make to the history of the great movements summarily reviewed in previous articles. During the first world war there was the great rank and file movement of shop stewards and Workers' Committees, the story of which has been told by William Gallacher (*Revolt on the Clyde,* 1936) and Harry Pollitt (*Serving My Time,* 1940) from their personal experience, and by Allen Hutt in his *British Trade Unionism* (1952). Class-collaboration practised by the British trade union leaders with the Asquith and Lloyd-George governments when the first world war broke out (1914) left the workers helpless at first against rising living costs, higher rents, worsened conditions and every other form of shameless exploitation. Starting with the initiative of Socialist shop stewards on the Clyde, great strikes were led under the guidance of delegate bodies elected, first in Glasgow, then in Sheffield, London and elsewhere. Higher wages were secured, rent restriction was established. A national organisation of shop stewards and Workers' Committees was set up in 1916. But as Gallacher has pointed out, the leaders of the movement did not, even after the war when revolt was seething everywhere, see the need for developing this great rank and file movement into a political struggle against capitalism on all fronts (*Revolt on the Clyde,* pp. 206-7, 220-1, 233-4). As a revolutionary movement, it subsided after 1919; although the shop stewards remained, a far more powerful ingredient of British trade unionism than before 1914.

The capitalist class was quick to take advantage of the weak spot.

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In 1917 it had already launched proposals for 'Whitley Councils', which by 1920 had been set up in a number of the less organised or scattered trades. The essence of the scheme was joint committees of management and workers' representatives in the factories, and joint councils of employers and trade union representatives locally and nationally. Its purpose was clearly understood by the workers in the basic industries as an attempt to create a rival organisation to their shop stewards: and in the main they rejected it. Even the reformist historians of the trade unions, Sidney and Beatrice Webb, recognised the scheme in 1920 as a 'specious' device of 'far-sighted capitalists' to create a 'formidable obstacle to any democratic control of industries'. And it may well have served as a model for the German Works Councils Law of 1920, mentioned earlier.

Twice subsequently the British working class has created in the course of struggle a different organisation, which could have become the embryo alternative government. The first was in August, 1920, when the threat of renewed war on Soviet Russia led to a counter-threat of a general strike. The Communist Party, formed shortly before, raised the issue of 'Committees of Action' in all the main industrial centres, at special protest meetings and in the press. When the Labour Party and trade union leaders, on August 9, 1920, established a 'Council of Action' in London to direct a possible general strike, the response of the workers was to create 350 local Councils of Action (composed primarily of the Trades Councils, sometimes reinforced by union district committees, representatives of working class parties, etc.), Lenin described the Council of Action, with its ultimatum to the government, as comparable with the central leadership of the Russian Soviets in 1917—'still under the control of the Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries, who were yet compelled to act like semi-Bolsheviks' (September 22, 1920). The Councils of Action themselves were 'the transition to the dictatorship (of the working class).... They were not called Soviets, but in actual fact they were such' (October 2, 1920).

War was prevented without a general strike, the Councils of Action did not become the beginnings of a new authority for Britain, and consequently the Labour Party and right-wing trade union leaders did not have the opportunity to show what they would have made of such a situation. This came in May, 1926, on the occasion of the general strike, launched to support the locked-out miners, by decision of a Conference of Union Executives. The

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left wing in the unions, led by the Communists, was strong enough to have created among the workers an organised movement of support for the miners at this juncture: but not strong enough to have won decisive positions in the trade union movement. As a result, when millions of workers struck and some 140 Councils of Action were formed once again, the central leadership fell into the hands of the General Council, the majority of whose members were secretly opposed to the general strike, while the small minority favouring it feared pushing it to the point of an open struggle for political power. In some respects both the local and the central Councils of Action did begin to function as alternative centres of political power (see Emile Burns' and R. Page Arnot's book *The General Strike*, 1926). However, when the strike was at its peak, the General Council called it off, with disastrous consequences.

Our British experience too has shown that Workers' Committees of Shop Stewards and Councils of Action are capable of rallying the workers in a class movement against the capitalists and the capitalist state. But in the absence of effective leadership by a resolute class-conscious workers' party, these movements left the capitalist system unshaken.

Hungary, 1956

Thus in Russia the Soviets and the Factory or Works Committees arose in struggle against the ruling capitalist class and, because the workers in 1917 gave their support to the Bolsheviks, carried that struggle to victory—the overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of workers' rule. In Germany, Austria, Poland, Hungary, Italy, Britain the conflict of classes between 1918 and 1926 rose to tremendous heights, and the workers too found new forms of organisation. But these forms proved only temporary, because the movement against the capitalist class which produced them had not the leadership of a party consistently anti-capitalist in its theory and practice.

In Hungary, in October, 1956, the factories, mines and railways, the banks, foreign trade and the bulk of home trade were public property, and capitalists and great landlords had been abolished as classes: although many individuals making up these classes continued to live in Hungary, they had taken employment as wage earners. Only 15 per cent of the land, however, was publicly-owned: the rest was the private property of the peasants, among whom the biggest estates (including those of the Catholic Church)

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had been divided. The trade unions had great power, and thousands of former workers held public office in every sphere.

Thus, although Hungarian economy and society were not yet Socialist—since private property in 85 per cent of the land still existed, and this meant the continuance of petty capitalism (Kulaks) in the countryside, petty traders, petty workshops, etc.—the working class was the ruling class in Hungary, in a position gradually to remould the whole of economy and society on socialist lines. Consequently there could be no question of a class revolt of the workers being necessary to change the system of society in Hungary. Any change in that system could only be to *weaken* the rule of the workers—the only class consistently interested in socialism—and correspondingly *strengthen* the position of the classes interested in a return to capitalism.

While every kind of peaceful mass pressure upon the old leadership of the Hungarian Workers' Party and the Government was fully justified, in order to eliminate those responsible for the gross errors of policy, involving many crimes, over a number of years past, the essential thing was not to allow it to develop into an armed conflict, still more into the destruction of the armed forces on which safety of the Hungarian People's Republic (like every other form of State) depended. For within the country there were thousands of former active supporters of the Horthy regime—officers of the old army, members of the Horthy police and gendarmerie, businessmen and former landowners, members of the numerous Fascist organisations (Arrow Cross, Nilasist, and many others)—who, far from being 'liquidated', had taken employment under the new regime (even in the Army) and could be relied upon to take full advantage of such a collapse of the State power. From 1919 to 1944 the people had been soaked in nationalist propaganda still far from obliterated. Outside the country, there were powerful imperialist forces, headed by United States subversive agencies, known to be in touch with the internal enemies.

The main responsibility for preventing mass discontent developing into physical violence (and thus giving these enemies their chance) lay upon the Hungarian Workers' Party as the political leadership of the working class. Events proved, however, that it had utterly lost any capacity to act in that way. Its internal cohesion, the authority of its leaders, had completely disappeared. It fell to pieces directly the mass discontent showed itself. As a consequence, that section of the workers who took part in the demonstrations had

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no political leadership—and it immediately fell into the hands of organised counter-revolutionary elements who, though relatively small in number, had as it proved been preparing for months past (many came in from abroad), had a well-worked-out plan of 'shock' operations against key positions, and were assured of long-prepared support from within the Army. Moreover they could appeal with confidence to the dispossessed elements already mentioned to follow their lead. Thus the *disintegration* of the political and military bulwarks of the Workers' State gave a chance to political and military forces aiming at a *different state*—one of restored capitalism (the broad programme of which was drawn by Cardinal Mindszenty in his notorious broadcast of November 3). It should be noted that the vast mass of the peasantry, as well as a large section of the workers, took no active part in the upheaval.

This situation found its precise reflection in the 'Workers' Councils' formed in factories during the October events. In a number of cases these consisted of much the same people as the previously existing factory and works committees—the basic trade union bodies—with the elimination of many full time workers who had become bureaucratic or apathetic to the workers' needs. But in many cases the counter-revolutionaries took advantage of the confusion in the minds of the workers—the absence of a firm and politically active workers' party—to set up 'Workers' Councils' which were a travesty of the title. The general pattern was one of armed gangs raiding the factories and forcing on the bewildered workers 'Councils' consisting of former Horthyites, often employees until then in the factory concerned.

Thus at Ganz Engineering Works, Budapest, employing 3,700 workers, 250 were present at a snap meeting convened at the height of the lynching terror in the streets, and forced to elect a 'Workers' Council' (including a former factory-owner and several ex-Fascists) under the eyes of four tommy-gunners in threatening attitudes. At the housing equipment works, a similar meeting of 60 workers elected a 'Workers' Council' which included a doctor who had served three years in jail for embezzling public funds, a former factory-owner, a former officer in the Horthy army, and a baron who had owned 2,800 acres. A number of similar 'Workers' Councils' came into being during the days of terror at other Budapest factories. At the 'First of May' Clothing factory the chairman was a former large shareholder. At the 11th district Bus Garage the chairman was a former major in the Horthy Army. At the

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Central Bus and Trolley Depot the 'Council' included two well-known former Nazis who threatened the workers with lynching if they resumed work. At the Heating Equipment factory the former owner became chairman of the 'Workers' Council'. At the Klement Gottwald works leadership of the 'Workers' Council' was in the hands of the son of the chief editor of the Nilasist (ultra-Fascist) paper *Uj Magyarorszag* under Horthy, a former S.S. man and a member of Horthy's former personal bodyguard. At the 'Fourth of April' Factory the chairman was a former landowner and the vice-chairman a former Nilas member. At a large mechanised bakery the chairman was formerly one of Horthy's Under-Ministers. At the Ball-Bearings works one of the most active members was a former capitalist. This picture of active Fascists and former exploiters becoming leaders of 'Workers' Councils' could be extended. It also applied in other industrial centres of Hungary.

Moreover the same methods were used to set up local 'revolutionary committees' or territorial 'Workers Councils'. Thus at Ujpest half the members were common criminals released from jails by the armed counter-revolutionaries. At Szeped the vice-chairman had been a major in Horthy's army. In the Mar district the vice-chairman was a man with 17 convictions for ordinary (non-political) crimes, the secretary had spent a total of 11 years in jail for similar offences, two members had been captains in Horthy's army and four had been gendarmes under Horthy.

To sum up, (i) the 'Workers' Councils' in Hungary did not represent a proletarian mass movement for the conquest of power; (ii) they reflected in fact the exploitation by counter-revolutionaries of the mass movement of discontent against the old government and Party leadership; (iii) set up as they were on the basis of 'Workers' Councils against Communists', they naturally fell into the hands and under the leadership of representatives of the dispossessed classes and the old regime; (iv) they were closer in type to the counter-revolutionary 'Soviets without Communists' experienced in Russia—at Baku and Murmansk in 1918, and above all at Kronstadt in 1921—than to any other body with a similar name during the last forty years; (v) like those cases, their success would have opened the way, not to a 'more democratic road to socialism', but to direct intervention by 'sympathetic' foreign imperialism and the full restoration of the capitalist system.

Reorganised and re-elected on a genuine delegate basis as factory organisations, and with the reconstituted Hungarian-Socialist

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Workers' Party (now over 250,000 strong) increasingly winning back the confidence of the working class, the Workers' Councils may yet as advisory bodies play an important part in repairing the damage done last autumn, and in opening a new period of economic advance in Socialist Hnugary, but it is too early to be positive.

Once again, as in Germany, Poland, Austria and Italy in 1918-1920, and as in the tragic precedent of Hungary itself in 1919, it has been proved that for *genuine* Workers' Councils as for all the other machinery of workers' power, the leadership of a united and resolute Communist Party is needed, secure in the allegiance of the workers by its fighting policy and its close attention to the opinions and interests of the class it represents.*

*The functioning of Workers' Councils in the factories of Yugoslavia is not dealt with in this series of articles for lack of adequate information. But there can be no doubt that the two essential conditions which exist in that country—political power in the hands of the working class, and leadership by a party devoted to the principles of Marxism-Leninism are making possible valuable Socialist experience, arising from the particular national conditions; like other forms of factory organisation of the workers in People's Democracies like Czechoslovakia, Poland, Bulgaria, etc.

Book Reviews

America and the British Left, by Henry Pelling. (174 pp. A. & C. Black. *18s.*)

THIS is not a systematic study but a series of short essays dealing with the attitude of the British Left to the United States. The term 'Left' is used here to include all shades of opinion from radical to communist and the book is sub-titled 'From Bright to Bevan', so raising expectations that it does not entirely fulfil. An introductory chapter of six pages covers the period from the American Revolutionary War of 1776-82 to the American Civil War of 1861-5. The serious study begins in 1865. This is more than half way through Bright's career. By choosing to start at this point Dr. Pelling is able to deal with the Chartists in two sentences (pp. 2 and 58) and, more surprisingly in view of the sub-title, scarcely mentions the campaign of the British radical and labour movement in support of the North during the American Civil War, a struggle in which Bright played an outstanding part. Yet this was one of the most significant phases of working class development in the nineteenth century.

During the Civil War the Northern blockade prevented cotton from reaching British ports. This caused heavy unemployment and destitution in Lancashire, yet the workers of that county, like the rest of their class throughout Britain, gave unstinting support to the North once it was clear that the abolition of slavery was bound up with a Northern victory. Conservatives and Liberals supported the South. Before the war was over, the International Working Men's Association had been formed, under the guidance of Karl Marx. At the request of the General Council of the International Marx drafted an address to Abraham Lincoln. It is a key document for an understanding of contemporary working class attitudes to the United States, but comes too soon for mention in this book. It describes the U.S.A. as the coun-

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try 'whence the first Declaration of the Rights of Man was issued'. Once the South had declared for slavery 'then the working classes of Europe understood at once . . . that the slaveholders' rebellion was to sound the tocsin for a general holy crusade of property against labour, and that for the men of labour, with their hopes for the future, even their past conquests were at stake in that tremendous conflict on the other side of the Atlantic'. In a very cordial reply Lincoln was able to declare, with truth, that the policy of the United States Government of the time 'neither is, nor could be, reactionary'.

Dr. Pelling shows that, as the outstanding example of democracy in the world, the United States enjoyed the sympathy and support of the Left for most of the nineteenth century. For the same reason it aroused the suspicion and hostility of the Right. A change occurred during the 1880s, when the U.S.A. began to appear as a citadel of big business and brutal repression. The judicial murder of five Chicago Anarchists in 1887 was, perhaps, a turning point. Two valuable chapters (V and VI) describe the appearance of American monopoly, trade unions and socialist parties. The influence of Debs and De Leon on James Connolly and Tom Mann, the influence of the I.W.W. on currents of revolutionary trade unionism in Britain is an aspect of Anglo-American relations too often forgotten. On the other side, the visit of Samuel Gompers and the A.F. of L. delegation to Britain in 1918, their uncompromising hostility to socialism and to attempts at reviving international labour contacts, is an instructive episode, well reconstructed by Dr. Pelling (Chapter VII). After 1918, the United States is presented

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as a technically progressive and politically democratic society, the merits of which the British Left too frequently overlooks, for doctrinaire reasons. McCarthyism is treated as an aberration due to a unique combination of factors, 'some of them transient'. (p. 154). The lack of any reference to Joe Hill, the Palmer Raids, Sacco and Vanzetti or the Rosenbergs helps to make this picture more convincing, though in a book on 'America and the British Left' such omissions are a little surprising.

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The U.S.S.R. Economy: A Statistical Abstract. (264 pp. Lawrence & Wishart. *21s.*)

THIS 1956 production by the Central Statistical Administration has been translated in good time. It gives up to 1955 a useful selection of statistics (either absolute figures or percentages) enabling comparison to be made with the years 1913, 1928 (before the first Five-Year-Plan) 1940 (before the war) as well as *some* of the post-war years. It can hardly be compared with the more massive 94th Annual Abstract of Statistics in this country as the basis of compilation and choice of subject is different: and some things lacking will no doubt be supplied in subsequent issues. Meantime it gives enough to show not only the transformation since 1913 but also the rapidity of development since 1950.

R.P.A.

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Published by the Proprietors, The Trinity Trust, 134, Ballards Lane, London, N.3, and printed by Wembley News, Wembley, Middlesex, Great Britain. Registered for transmission by Magazine Post to Canada, including Newfoundland.

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(Continued from page ii of cover)

Mention of William Morris calls to mind a reader's letter addressed to our Labour Discussion Forum. What he had seen during the engineering and shipbuilding strike had reminded him of the qualities necessary to achieve Socialism in Britain: '*Imagination enough to conceive, courage enough to will, power enough to compel—let these qualities prevail amongst the due effective majority of society and then I say the thing can be done.*' Another, chairman of the strike committee, found it 'an eye-opener to see what real working-class democracy means and what it will be when fully developed, under Socialism. Agreement, swift action, plenty of initiative all round, and discipline; no "minority rights" to differ with pickets and blacklegs.'

During the engineering strike, readers found recent issues of L.M. useful ammunition. There were, for example, the telling figures given by Thomas Graham, the foundry workers' leader, in *Clash in Engineering*. The quotations on this cover from the 'Document' of the employers in 1852 were found timely and so up-to-date that some people were taken in; they could scarcely believe that these were not the very words of their own 'guv'nor'. However, it has to be admitted that the effect of the strike was to cut down—temporarily only, I have no doubt—support to our own fund. An engineering shop steward, recent prize-winner in our Labour Discussion Forum, had meant to send back the cheque as a donation: 'However, like every other engineer I have been involved in activity *re* the wages dispute, and I'm afraid that I gave the strike funds priority on the guinea. I hope you'll understand and perhaps I'll make it up when circumstances improve'. Indeed, we understand. As it happens, some particularly generous gifts reached us from overseas readers, such as the Canadian who celebrated his birthday by giving *us* a present. Writes he: 'The articles are full of information which never sees the light in any capitalist press. This is a time when we must all keep the pot boiling. We must never let L.M. down for lack of funds. How I wish it was read by all workers, not only in Great Britain, but the world over'. That will come! Meanwhile overseas readers saved the fund from a dangerous 'low' at:

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